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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000384

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR BNEULING  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE, D. TEITELBAUM

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC CANDIDATES OPTIMISTIC

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Eric T. Schultz under Section 1.  
4 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met February 23 with three MDC officials: sitting Ministers of Parliament Willias Madzimure and Job Sikhala who are defending their seats, and MDC candidate for Parliament Goodrich Chibaira. The candidates were optimistic that the MDC would do well in the elections, especially given that political violence was much lower than in the past. They offered various theories as to why President Mugabe had directed that the elections be non-violent, including international pressure, a desire to retire gracefully, or because he was falsely confident that ZANU-PF could win without violence. The three MDC officials agreed that a government of national unity following the elections might provide a resolution to Zimbabwe's crisis.  
END SUMMARY.

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Less Political Violence  
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¶2. (C) Willias Madzimure and Job Sikhala are both incumbent MDC M.P.s in constituencies in Harare and are running in the March 31 election. Goodrich Chibaira, also an MDC candidate in a Harare constituency, is a first-time candidate. All three MDC officials reported continuing low levels of violence compared to 2000 and 2002. There were some incidents. Sikhala for instance said there had been some altercations between ZANU-PF and MDC supporters after one of the rallies in Harare and that the police had not arrested the ZANU-PF supporters who had incited the incidents. However, Sikhala and Madzimure confirmed that levels of violence were clearly lower this election.

¶3. (C) Sikhala attributed the lack of violence to President Mugabe's public statements that no political violence would be tolerated. This marked a major change from the past, when Mugabe himself called for and incited violence. Even lower levels of party and government structures were heeding the call for non-violence, albeit reluctantly. Sikhala said the MDC leadership had barred officials from verbally attacking Mugabe personally and that Mugabe was also attacking MDC as an institution rather than individuals within the party. Madzimure also noted that in contrast with past elections, there was no military command center running the ZANU-PF campaign. Sikhala added that Mugabe and Mujuru were themselves campaigning instead of using soldiers and war veterans to campaign. Without Mugabe directing violence and with the reduced involvement of the military and war veterans, all three officials predicted there would be very little violence this time.

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But Why?  
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¶4. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question as to why there was less violence, Madzimure said he worried that Mugabe had some other plan for ensuring ZANU-PF supremacy, perhaps in the counting of the ballots, and that he knew he would not need to rely on violence. He said Mugabe might also have been influenced by international pressure and by a desire to ensure that the elections were seen as legitimate. Mugabe knew that political violence might not work in ZANU-PF's favor and that, if ZANU-PF must lose, it would be better to lose in a peaceful environment. Sikhala suggested that Mugabe might even want the MDC to win because he had no clear successor in ZANU-PF and that the MDC would treat a retired Mugabe better than would members of a factionalized ZANU-PF with scores to settle. Madzimure and Sikhala said another possibility was that Mugabe falsely believed that ZANU-PF would win the elections without violence because his advisors were lying to him about ZANU-PF's prospects. Finally, both Madzimure and Sikhala suggested that Mugabe might be concerned with protecting his legacy and wanted a peaceful election before he stepped down.

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MDC Prospects  
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¶5. (C) Madzimure and Sikhala both predicted the MDC would win

with 60 seats or more out of 120 elected seats, due to voters, awareness that ZANU-PF had done nothing in five years to improve their daily lives. They said that, with continued low levels of political violence, Zimbabweans would feel free to vote as they wished -- for the MDC. Madzimure said that voters were most interested in better employment, pensions, health, and education, and knew that ZANU-PF did not care about those issues. Sikhala added that ZANU-PF had won the last election by fraud but with more open elections this time, they would not win a majority of the elected seats or an overall two-thirds majority. The MDC would retain its ability to block unilateral constitutional change and could force ZANU-PF to the negotiating table.

National Unity Government?

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16. (C) Madzimure said that a source of his within ZANU-PF had heard top party leaders discussing the possibility of negotiating a national government of unity with the MDC. The MDC leadership was also quietly discussing this possibility, in particular as a means to a new constitution. Sikhala said that some MDC supporters would not be happy with the idea of a power-sharing arrangement because they counted on the MDC to provide new ideas after years of ZANU-PF mismanagement of politics and the economy. However, following a discussion of what the MDC might gain from a place in government, such as the ability to deliver services to constituents and the like, he embraced the idea along with his colleagues as a way forward that could resolve Zimbabwe's crisis peacefully. Madzimure added that ZANU-PF leaders were willing to consider unity with the MDC due to deep divisions within ZANU-PF. There was a backlash against the Zezuru ethnic group to which Mugabe and Vice-President Joyce Mujuru belonged and an anti-Zezuru group was forming to counter a perceived attempt by Mugabe to fill all top leadership positions with Zezuru.

Moyo's Legacy?

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17. (C) Madzimure and Sikhala said ZANU-PF would not win Matabeleland without Jonathan Moyo because the Ndebele did not identify with John Nkomo and had no other emotional ties to ZANU-PF. Sikhala said that Moyo was running as an independent solely as retribution against ZANU-PF because his candidacy would split the ZANU-PF vote and ensure that ZANU-PF candidate could not win.

Outside Influence

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18. (C) All MDC candidates agreed that international pressure was an important factor in ZANU-PF's decision to reduce the level of political violence. They expressed appreciation for U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe but Sikhala said he thought Zimbabwe should not be compared with the other &outposts of tyranny," Most of which had never had elections. Mugabe had always had elections, even if they were &done wrong.<sup>8</sup>

Comment

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19. (C) The lower levels of political violence thus far in the campaign period are significant and as we have said elsewhere may produce a surprise. If the MDC wins at least 51 seats, it would retain its ability to block constitutional change. This could force ZANU-PF to negotiate with the MDC and might lead to calls, including especially from South Africa, for a government of national unity. This was the first time we have heard MDC officials openly discuss such a prospect and it was interesting to see how quickly they convinced themselves that this could be a way forward after the election. They could be right. Civil society activists might accuse the MDC of selling out but if such a government led to real change, including paving the way for Mugabe's departure, it might merit support.

SCHULTZ